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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a framework for strategic planning in universities in Sub-Saharan Africa can be developed with the background of global, regional, and institutional realities. Using the specific case of the University of Buea in Cameroon, the paper attempts to expose the global trends of polarization in knowledge production capacity as an input to the process of strategic planning in institutions. It uses the national policy background to highlight the context and inherent role of the central government in the process of institutional strategic planning. Research reported was based on data derived from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a sample of faculty members at the University of Buea and documentary evidence. Buea was chosen as a showcase on strategic planning because it was the only university of six state universities that developed a 5-year strategic plan after the 1993 reforms. (Contains 34 references.) (Author/BT)

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Higher Education Strategic Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa:

A Case Study of Cameroon

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Abstract: *This paper argues that a framework for strategic planning in universities in Sub-Saharan Africa can be developed on the background of global, regional and institutional realities. Using the specific case of the University of Buea in Cameroon, it attempts to expose the global trends of polarisation in knowledge production capacity as an input to the process of strategic planning in institutions. The national policy background is used to highlight the context and inherent role of the central government in the process of institutional strategic planning.*

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Introduction

Cameroon is a Sub-Saharan African (SSA) state located in the Central African Sub region. The most significant colonial legacy in this nation is perhaps the French/English bilingual and bicultural systems that currently dominate public policy. This circumstance dates back to the First World War when the combined Anglo-French force invaded the then German colony in 1916. The two powers jointly ruled the country from 1919 on a mandatory basis under the League of Nations. Great Britain was assigned about one-fifth while France had the remaining four–fifth of the territory. The French granted independence to its territory in 1960 and in 1961 part of the British territory (Southern Cameroons) reunified with the French portion (La Republique du Cameroun). Therefore for forty-five years the organisation of public services including education was going to be conditioned by the traditions of the mandate holders (France and Britain). Hence reunification in 1961 meant that there had to be harmonisation or coexistence of the political and socio-economic institutions of the regions under a single state machinery.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw far reaching changes in the landscape of higher education in Cameroon. These changes could be interpreted as a natural sequel to the gradual but steady accumulation of problems from independence and reunification of the Cameroons in 1960 and 1961 respectively. At the same time it can also be noticed that most issues emerging in the system were analogous to what could be perceived in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Developing countries as a whole. The perception of multilateral analysts on higher education in the region is also shifting. In 1986 at a meeting with African vice-chancellors in Harare Zimbabwe, the World to Bank argued that higher education in Africa was a luxury rather than a necessity (Brock-Utne, 2000, p.218). Today the same institution may not uphold such a view. The UNESCO/World Bank Task Force for Higher Education in Developing Countries (2000, p.20) asserts that the social rates of returns on investment in higher education are substantial and exceed the private returns

by a wider margin than previously thought. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and its work group on higher education (WGHE) has also the notion that the vitality of higher education in SSA has been rediscovered. Therefore as higher education institutions, systems and multilateral organisations or donor agencies grapple to contend the dynamics of change for the purpose decision-making, there is a corresponding need for analysts to provide more discernable and practical knowledge for management and governance.

In this article I argue that the global, regional, and national context of polarising trends in knowledge production provides information for universities in Cameroon and Sub-Saharan Africa to develop their strategies. Drawing from the context of the nation's higher education reforms of 1992/1993 and the experience of the University of Buea (UB) in strategic planning in particular, I will demonstrate that a 'global strategic plan' (Njeuma *et al*, 1999) for the Ministry of Higher Education could be a golden opportunity for the universities only if the knowledge base of such a projects is sufficiently questioned at the grassroots or institutional level. This implies that the experience of the UB illustrates that strategic planning may through light on answers to some of the strategic and operational problems of higher education in the sub region especially if the institutions are adequately empowered in the strategy formulation and implementation.

Methodology

Strategy formulation and implementation is involves the constant alignment of internal and external environment of the organisation or institution for learning and positive change Curtis, 1995: p.47). Ozga, (2000: p.52) also argues that common concepts are open to different conceptualisations in process of intellectual work thereby creating what she calls 'a lacework of meanings'. The choice of methods of data collection in this study took the difficulties posed by the above propositions.

The research reported in this article was based on data derived from an in-depth semi structured interview with a sample of faculty members in the University of Buea and documentary evidence. Both the interviews and documents were aimed at establishing an authentic narrative of the key issues in the strategic planning process, namely: ownership, understanding of the external and internal policy context in the higher education system. Documentary evidence included reports of workshops on strategic planning, senate and administrative council meeting resolutions, the UB strategic plan for 1998-2003, newsletters and other internal publications. Using 'constant comparison' method the researcher derived the premises on which the arguments of this article are based.

Discussions are divided into three main parts: part one reviews the process of strategic planning. This part outlines a general theoretical conception of strategic planning as a framework for understanding its use in higher education organisations. Part two briefly presents the global concern, African context, national context, institutional processes and brief socio-political circumstances (at the national level) under which change took place. Part three discusses the broader implications and strategic lessons for higher education institutions in Cameroon and SSA as a whole.

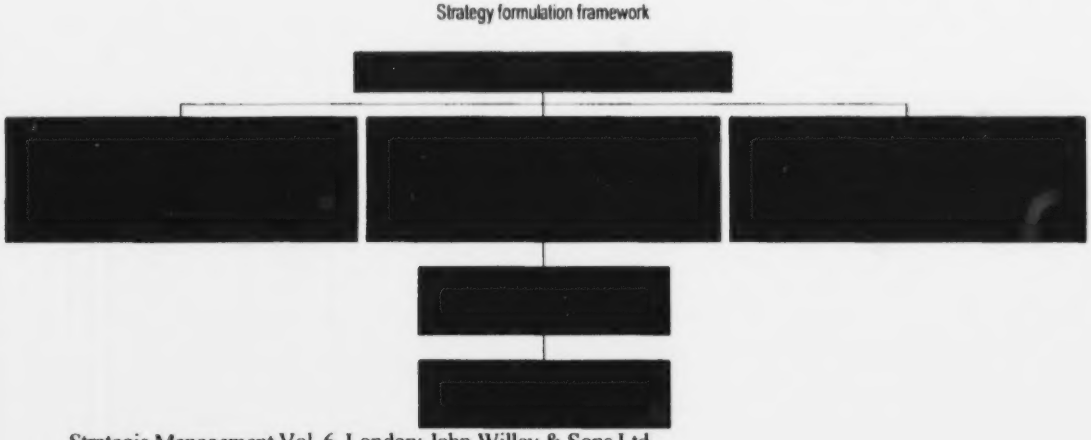
Two main reasons prompted the choice of the University of Buea as a showcase on strategic planning. One is that after the reforms of 1993 it was the only university out of the six state universities that developed a five-year strategic plan. Given the managerial and academic successes registered in the institution it is inferred that it can be attributed to the implementation of the strategic plan. The other is that the most articulate changes that have taken place in the higher education sector in the country in the 1990s may be expressed in the developments in the institution.

PART ONE

The Strategic Planning Process

Literature on Strategic Management indicates that one of the most crucial challenges of the area is deriving a transferable theory for strategy building in organisations. It highlights the distinction between strategy formulation and implementation. According to Mockler (1995) though strategy formulation is very central to understanding strategic management it does not sufficiently provide a concrete direction for action. This can only be provided by strategy implementation. This view suggests that strategy implementation poses even more difficulties than strategy formulation. However a basic framework can be derived to serve as a road map to strategy formulation (Mezias, Gringer and Gruth 2001; Hills and Jones 1995. p.15; Mockler 1995).

Source: Mockler, 1995 Strategic Management: The Beginning of the New Era IN: Hussey (Ed) International Review of



Strategic Management Vol. 6, London: John Willey & Sons Ltd.

It is important to *define the nature and objectives* by elaborating the mission and goals that justify the existence of the organisation. This includes how it intends to satisfy its customers in terms of value for money and social responsibility. Universities might define such missions and goals to reflect the needs of their internal and external stakeholders (Sallis, 1992). The internal stakeholders include the academic,

administrative staff and support staff, and the external stakeholders are the students, the local community, the state and international community. The mission and goals of the institution are viable in pointing to the direction to which resources will be concentrated or the proportion of resource allocation.

External analysis is the identification of position of the organisation in national, regional and wider arena. The aim of this analysis is to spot possible threats and opportunities in its operating environment. Competitiveness and compatibility are driving the strategies of most higher education institutions today. These forces in themselves constitute the *sine quo non* of change. According to Pashiardis (1996) strategic planning of which environmental scanning is part assumes an open system whereby organisation must constantly change and adapt as needs of the larger society change. He sees environmental scanning as central in focusing on the process of planning, building a vision, community development in order to build scenario for decision centres. Such scenarios would consist of a hypothetical sequence of events constructed for the purpose of focusing attention on causal processes and decision points. The strategies of most universities therefore strive to meet certain parameters within national and regional leagues. The regional location of the universities in Cameroon, for instance, and the multitude of private higher education institutions might give room for a possibility for the development of individual competitive advantage.

An analysis of the above components could be made to derive a strategic choice in a process that identifies the *strength weaknesses opportunities and threats* (SWOT analysis). It provides concrete directions for the generation, allocation and usage resources. It can also permit institutions to take up specific programs or projects with a clear notion of their utility to the system or *business strategy* (Davies and Allison 1999, p.112). However it is of no benefit to set goals and design projects without a clear understanding of the *organisation structure and processes* that will implement them. Structure provides a framework for accountability and evaluation.

It is beyond the scope of this article provide a comprehensive model of/for competitive advantage for the higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan African countries. However, it is worth pointing out that its geographical, economic and socio-cultural potentials like in most countries could constitute strength and opportunities on which strategic planning can capitalise. This implies that each university has the potential for the development of centres of competence that might place it in a significant position within national and international competitiveness. Such an adaptation is not different from the use the general theoretical framework of strategic planning in formulating a strategy in any business. The formulation and implementation of the strategy would depend on the desired image for the organisation (Ivy, 2001).

Mintzberg, (1994) also argues that there are at least ten schools of thoughts in the planning process. This elasticity in the process is due to the fact that strategy is always contingent on each situation. Mockler further highlights that the environment of the organisation is of vital importance in determining the approach to strategy formulation. The environmental conditions may be stable, turbulent or chaotic. Strategy formulation on the other hand may be manager-oriented or highly analytical and focused on micro contingencies. He demonstrates his strong preference on an approach that focuses on micro-contingencies as a means of embracing the macro contingencies. This is an approach whereby expert planners focus on frontline operations or specific situations to develop scenarios and decision centres.

Universities like most businesses are structured with functional units such as Human Resource, Information Systems, Marketing, Financial Management and Production or Faculties and schools. These are services that support the general or corporate business strategy through their respective strategies. What seems apparent is the intractable dominance of information in the achievement of productivity in prosperous organisations today. Hence 'firms, regions or nations fundamentally depend on their capacity to generate, process and apply efficiently knowledge-based information' for success (Castells, 1996, p.66). It may

therefore follow that Information Systems as a unit is the most important. Therefore considerable attention should be paid on the Information Systems strategy.

However it is important for institutions to identify the distinction between information systems strategy and business information technology strategy (Curtis, 1995). The business information systems strategy focuses on determining the information needs of the organisation and how it relates to the business strategy. This involves the identification of decision-making centres in formulated strategy and setting systems for tracking relevant information. Business information technology strategy on the other hand is concerned with determining what technology and technological systems are required for business information systems strategy to be realised. It may also be a question of technological cost-benefit analysis. Strategic planning permits the strategy to focus on adapting the technology to organisational needs rather than vice versa.

Though the implementation of strategy is more difficult than the formulation stage it is possible to identify five 'make-happen' areas on which success may depend (Hardy, 1995) namely:

1. There should be a complete resource commitment at strategic level.
2. Policies and programmes should be formulated at the sub-unit level to implement the strategies.
3. An appropriate structure should be designed to meet with the nature of the strategy through sufficient clarification of roles and relationships.
4. A clear and realistic system of reward should be devised to motivate internal and external stakeholders.
5. Adequate analysis should be made of the human resources needed to accomplish the implementation task.

The most obvious question at this point would address the relevance of the foregoing arguments in theorising about higher education strategic planning. By logical extension, the same question would apply to

the case of higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The argument that may be adopted as a framework for analysis in this paper leans on the following propositions that seem to dominate the literature:

- that strategic planning whether in service or industrial sector is contingent on particular circumstances of the organisation.
- that education organisations can also adapt their strategic plans to requirements of their core activities
- and that a single country case study may be relevant in reflecting on strategic planning in sub-Saharan Africa because of the similarities in global, historical and institutional realities facing the sub region.

Curtis (1995, p.46) asserts that it is possible to for a business to function without an explicit strategic plan. In such an institution performance is based on routine activities. Such a situation is analogous to a ship, which is underway without a destination or sailing without knowledge of the nature of its waters. He further outlines three main reasons why a strategic plan may be necessary in an organisation, namely:

1) Subsystems or department may function well within their objectives but at the same time does not serve the objectives of the organisation. This may be because the objectives of the department are counter to those of the organisation and may lead to system sub optimisation. Therefore it is necessary to design an agreed and communicated plan and how to achieve it.

2) The organisation would occasionally need resource allocation for its development. These allocations can only be made against agreed direction for the organisation or a strategy for the future.

3) The organisation has responsibilities to its internal and external stakeholders. The corporate plan will normally embody particular interests for these groups and therefore these interests will be perceived at the level of the organisation's success.

Similar assumptions may have been the explanation behind the Jaratt report of 1985 in Great Britain jointly commissioned by the UGC and the committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals which recommended that universities work and operate under a corporate plan (Becher and Kogan, 1992)

One of the main concerns of Educational Management practitioners and analysts is to ascertain the difference between the typical corporate models of strategic planning and those relevant to higher education. Saker and Speed (1996) for instance sound a note of warning on the applicability of strategic planning in educational services. However the reservations do not dismiss the fact that the educational sector has begun to see the increasing need for planning in order to maintain its responsiveness to the rapidly changing environment (Kriemadis, 1997). According to Burler-Miko (1985) the concept of planning has existed under different labels in the post second world war period. Master plan was the vogue in the nineteen sixties; long range planning in the nineteen seventies and strategic planning in the nineteen eighties and nineties. What seemed significantly common in the process at different points in history was the notion of anticipating change and developing a proactive measure, a goal which is not strange to education. Therefore based on empirically tested view and theories of strategic planning in organisations an actionable theory can be devised to respond to the need for strategic planning in higher education institutions (Calori,Atmer and Nunes, 2000).

Inspiration in strategy building could also be drawn from other disciplines. A significant body of literature in development studies propounds that chances of success in development ventures may be maximised if a bottom-top approach in decision-making is adopted (Corbridge, 1995:p.1; Chambers, 1983; Chambers, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2000).

PART TWO

The Global and Local Concerns.

Castells (1996, p.106) describes the landscape of global economic development and shows the emergence of a symbolic triangular network in the development of science and technology. This triangle connects three dominant regions, namely, North America, the European Union and industrialised Asia. He further points out that nation-states or regions that are reluctant to undertake consistent innovations by developing a knowledge-based production models run the risk of being continuously marginalized or kept out of this space of flows. The major argument posited by Castells in this analysis is that there is a new pattern of division of labour in the world's political economy that does not develop along traditional historical and geographical lines. He further notes that the 'newest' division of labour in question is different from the perspective developed in the 1970s and documented by Froebel in 1980. This strand of thinking presupposes that the concept of developed industrialised west/north and developing south/third world has changed. Therefore the opportunities of marginalisation as well as inclusion exist in a relatively conceivable degree.

The Circumstances of some regions especially Sub-Saharan Africa on the global platform show the extent of marginalisation facing them. Brock-Utne (2000, p. 216) echoes the fears of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that 'a new global apartheid' might be created as a result of uneven distribution of higher education resources and capacity to generate and create new knowledge. This is because there is a trend toward polarisation between the north and the south. In the 1990s, the gap in Research and Development (R&D) widened by 170%. The number of scientists and technicians involved in R&D related activities also increased by 60% in the north. Sub-Saharan African share of scientists and engineers in R&D stood at 1% and 0.2% of global capital on this activity. In 1995 all research papers in sciences and social sciences published in Sub-Saharan Africa stood at 5,839 as against 249,386 in the USA, 61,734 in the UK, 12,825 in Sweden, 4,264 in Norway just to mention a few. Cameroon, for instance, had 144 publications. This

demonstrates the immense difference in the capacity of countries of the North as compared to Sub-Saharan Africa. (UNESCO/World Bank 2000, p.124).

Kifle (1997, p.113) has also demonstrated that inadequate attention on diversification through R&D might expose Sub-Saharan Africa to a defeat on 'home grounds'. This metaphor means that those primary products that in most cases account for a substantial part of the economic development might be developed better in areas out of Africa by way innovations in biotechnology. This predicament logically poses a challenge to the higher education systems of Sub-Saharan African countries to reinvigorate their missions and to strive to attain them (UNESCO/World Bank, 2000, p.96).

The African Context

The relationship between higher education and national development has undergone some changes in Sub-Saharan Africa from the nineteenth century to date. The transition between liberation from the slave trade and the imposition of colonial rule generated a vision of a university mission characterised by mental liberation from the shackles of the slave trade and religious dogma. Claims were accordingly directed to an African secular university, which emphasised the use and learning of African languages (Ajayi, Goma & Johnson, 1996, p.187). The natural consequence of this phenomenon led to the underlying presupposition that higher education was akin to nationalism. It followed in the same light in other public services deemed as crucial to nations' lives such as air transport, rail transport etc.

The period leading to independence witnessed the emergence of the ideology that the mission of the nation was same as that of its universities, that is, mental, economic and political liberation or de-colonisation. This implied that the university did not need to be autonomous. Most African nations gained independence in the early part of the 1960s. As indicated earlier, in these nations higher education was seen as an important instrument of national development (Neave and Van Vught, 1994). Nyerere and Nkrumah thought higher

education could help the nation in the process of societal development (Mwiria, 1992, p.2). Yesufu (1973) emphasises this view in the assertion that the African university

> ... must not pursue knowledge for its own sake, but for the sake of and the amelioration of the conditions of life and work of the ordinary man and woman. It must be fully committed to active participation in the social transformation, economic modernization, and training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation...(p 82).

This view suggests pressure on the nations to adapt their higher education systems to the changing development needs. What remains completely out of the scope of this paper is the extent to which academic freedom was guaranteed in such systems.

This state of affairs went on even far into the post-independent days when the state virtually took over the definition of the mission of higher education. Action at the universities depended on what the state bureaucracy prescribed. The mission of higher education could not be separated from that of that of the state (Ajayi, Goma & Johnson, 1996, p.188). Whatever the stage of post-independent Sub-Saharan African states development was focused on strong national government with centralised planning, rural development and population control, income re-distribution and equality of access; economic structural adjustment and multiparty politics, human resource and capacity building, stressing sustainable development. This changing emphasis called for direct involvement of the universities in development programmes.

The 70% loss of market shares on primary products and the exacerbation of external debt problems for SSA countries had a very negative impact on public finances in the 1980s and 1990s (Hussain, 1997). The subsequent structural adjustment forced the universities and the national economy in general to strive towards doing more with less. This was due to cutbacks in resources, which resulted in decline in standards. Under these circumstances state funds in all sector was followed by greater demand for accountability. In Cameroon, State Corporations signed performance contracts with the government as precondition for financing. The

advocating of private universities could be attributed to this development. Though the role of higher education in national development remained primary, there was no way it would not be affected by the wind of accountability.

The Evolution of Higher Education in Cameroon.

A university as an institution of higher education with the mission of teaching, learning and research came into existence in Cameroon on the 22nd of July 1962. That is the date of the creation of the University of Yaounde. The mission of the lone university was to train manpower for the public service of the newly independent Cameroon (Njuema *et al*, 1999, p.2). Southern Cameroon (the English speaking United Nation mandate territory) had just reunified with *La Republique du Cameroun* by the plebiscite of 1961, hence the decree creating the university specified that it was bilingual (English/ French). By 1970 the university had 7000 students whereas the initially planned number of students it could host was 5000. This trend towards obesity continued and in 1977 four university centres were created in order to decongest the university, namely: the university centre for languages, translation and interpretation in Buea; the university centre in Douala for Business studies and training of teachers of technical education; the university centre of Dschang for Agriculture; and the university centre of Ngaoundere for food science and food technology. The University of Yaounde, however, remained the only full-fledged university in the country. Apart from the emerging problems of overcrowding, policy makers found it difficult to clearly define the status of the languages in the bilingual system. These extensions did not solve the problems since by 1984 enrolment stood at about 17000, by 1990 it rose to 36490 and 39151 in 1991.

The structure of the system was akin to that of France. Entrance into the university centres and specialised institutes was very competitive and based on the actual openings available in the public service for recruits. This implies that going to any of the university centres or to any of the specialised institutions was a guarantee for a well-paid government job. For this reason the state could not create free entry into these schools even if

the infrastructure still had room for more students. Another limitation of the specialised institutions was that the programmes offered there did not correspond to the academic needs of the tens of thousands of students who left secondary school every year. The facilities created to host the various university centres were highly underused. The university centre in Buea, for example, could accommodate 2000 students and yet there were only 60 effectively studying there. As a result the following problems ensued:

- The dramatic growth in student enrolment from 7,000 in 1970 to 39,000 in 1991 at Yaounde University was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in infrastructure. This naturally resulted in overcrowded lecture halls and other facilities. Under such conditions the teaching and learning process was bound to be very ineffective.

- Bilingualism as a language policy in the university was not effective since teaching was carried out predominantly in French thereby creating a situation of imbalance between the two languages. The English-speaking students increasingly felt marginalized because this situation also caused them to register very high rates of failure in examinations.

- Staff recruitment was far less than the growth in student enrolment so the staff-student ratio was high. This also rendered teaching and the supervision of student research very difficult.

- Laboratory equipment was grossly insufficient for the number of students enrolled for such courses. This either resulted in students shifting to other faculties or ineffectiveness in the teaching and learning process.

- Quite apart from the fact that the existing library facility was inadequate for the number of students, a new library building that was constructed remained unequipped for decades.

Out-dated books were never replaced and the rate of acquisition insufficient as per the demand for books.

These factors affected both the motivation and possibilities of the students and therefore resulted in low academic performance and capacity. The overall success rate in the annual examinations stood at 30%. This high rate of failure of 70% further justified high dropout rates. Budgetary allocation was also a very serious problem. About 46.3% of the expenditure was for personnel, 43.3% on student stipends, 8.9% on recurrent expenditure and only 1.5% on research and laboratory facilities.

The curricula designed in the 1960s were grossly inadequate in the 1990s for the demand of the expanding private sector, market forces and the increasing tendency of the government towards retrenchment and down sizing of the public service manpower. The number of unemployed graduates was growing in the society. This was mostly due to the fact that the skills acquired in the university were highly inadequate for the requirements of the labour market. The general picture of the university community in Cameroon was that of a demoralised and de-motivated academic and non-academic staff. The situation was highly compounded by the following problems: the absence of a clearly defined career profile for academic staff; the prevalence of teaching overloads and poor teaching conditions; the absence of clear-cut and objective criteria for promotion based on merit; the lack of research facilities and study leave opportunities.

Under these circumstances higher education in Cameroon was viewed to be sick and has lost all the elements of quality that it could boast of. The main policy challenge was then to re-establish quality by way of revitalisation and overhaul. Government reacted in decrees No.92/74 of 13th April 1992 and 93/034 of 19th January 1993 instituting some major reforms in the system. The main aim of the reforms was stated to be to broaden the participation of different stakeholders in the financing and management of higher education institutions through the introduction of tuition fees and eventual constriction of state funding.

This ambition would presuppose considerable emphasis on quality assurance and accountability as explicit goals in governance and management. This was operationalised to the following objectives:

- To provide universities with more academic and management autonomy.
- To provide all Cameroonians with the opportunity to obtain university education.
- To expand and increase higher education opportunities and make university programs more professional and more responsive to market forces.
- To make universities more accessible to local, regional, national and international communities.
- To decongest the overcrowded Yaounde University by raising university centres to the status of full-fledged universities with specific missions geared towards an overall national development perspective.
- To make rational optimal use of infrastructure, facilities and services.
- To revive and maximise inter-university and international co-operation

The Socio-Political Context

The general state of discontent that characterised the thinking nationwide also carried significant policy implications. In 1990 a constitutional amendment re-instituted multiparty politics in the country. Consequently the law of association was reviewed and the creation of organisation (including political ones) was relaxed. The grievances, especially, of the Anglophone Cameroonians on many issues (including higher education) were swelling. For the first time after reunification in 1961 they met in Buea in 1991 to reconsider the terms of the reunification because they felt marginalized by the regime. This issue officially surfaced what

is today referred to as the "Anglophone Nationalism [1]". The changes made were therefore expected to serve as a vent for political and social animosity against the state.

The general tendency of liberalisation, institutional autonomy and freedom of association enshrined in the1990 multiparty constitutional amendment led to private initiatives mediating state action and social pressure for greater access to higher education. This was in the form of the creation of higher education institutions by private entrepreneurs and religious bodies for example, the Central African Catholic University in Yaounde, the International University (IU) in Bamenda, Bamenda University of Science and Technology (BUST), SAMBA Superiuer in Yaounde, SIANTO Superiuer in Yaounde, National Polytechnique in Bambui near Bamenda, FONAB Polytechnique in Bamenda, and many others fast emerging. There is also the North West Provincial Academy (an independent organisation whose aim is to promote educational ventures). The development of these institutions is simply a result of social pressure and the persistent inability of the existing state university to absorb all the qualified upper secondary school graduates [2]. It has remained a problem for the state bureaucracy to enact a detailed policy for the regulation of the institutions to ensure quality and equity.

In his report at the UNESCO world conference on higher education in Paris in 1998 the Minister of Higher Education also declared that it is the government's intention to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit in the higher education sub-sector (Mebara, 1998). Such a policy goal will naturally fall within the framework of the objectives of the 1993 reforms (mentioned earlier). Bill No. 694/PJL/AN of March 2001 was presented to parliament proposing a comprehensive policy framework for higher in the country. The focus of this paper is not to posit a critique of the bill but it is worth noting that the document acknowledged that higher was without a legislative framework until then. This presupposes that the system was steered using regulatory provisions (decrees). A situation, which is also indicative of the centralised nature of such a system. Given

that a decentralised system would provide the freedom for institutions to design an appropriate corporate plan, the following question surfaces: Did the Bill resolve the issue?

Njeuma *et al* (1999) argue that apart from the University of Buea none of the six state universities of the country has a detailed strategic plan. This might have been because there is no explicit mandatory provision in the decree instituting the 1993 reforms (most recent) for strategic planning. However in 1999 the Ministry of higher education developed a plan to appoint UNESCO experts to draw general strategic plan for the ministry. This demonstrated the government's perception of the central role which strategic planning can play in meeting its goals in the higher education sub sector.

The University of Buea

Buea is the provincial headquarters of the South West province (one of the two English speaking provinces). The University of Buea was created along side four others in the 1993/93 reforms with an aim of serving the English speaking population in particular and other Cameroonians who wished to study in English. The University Center for Translation and Interpretation (mentioned earlier) was then extended to a full-fledged university. The university started with an enrolment of 2048 students in 1993 and by 1995 the enrolment stood at 4093 students.

The political and economic environment in which this institution was created was difficult. The period cited above was in the heat of a generalised economic crisis (as mentioned earlier) with an accompanying devaluation of the nation's currency. The reform creating the university was regarded by most donor agencies as inconsistent with the economic situation of the country as well as other African countries (Njeuma *et al* 1999, p.1). Under these circumstances the

senior management of the university understood that there would be the need to be 'armed with the unflinching determination to succeed against all odds' (Njeuma, 1998). In order to reinforce the collaboration of the government, the community, and friends abroad they decided embark on strategic planning in order to have a clear sense of direction.

Though a legal framework or policy instrument was already in place for the university to go operational, no formal finances was made available by the government for the institution to take off for the 1993/94 academic year. Faculty and central administration was appointed. The major problem of the institution was financing. The student registration fees could only amount to 30% of the total budget of the university. Despite the financial constraints the consensus was that the university should launch. The community was ready to make financial sacrifices but on a strict condition that this should be backed by efficiency and accountability. Consequently the management of the University of Buea (UB) opted to identify themselves with those who think that strategic planning could be applied in higher education sector.

A document entitles 'Priority projects of the University of Buea' was prepared by the Development office. It identified amongst other things the preparation of a strategic plan. This culminated in a series of workshops jointly run by the UB in collaboration with the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom (UK). The aim of the workshops was to develop a procedure for the drawing of a five-year strategic plan for the university. It also focused on how to adopt an annually updated plan for academic development. The management of the institution acknowledged the utility of the workshop as follows:

> It provided the management of the University of Buea an opportunity to appreciate the value and importance of having a strategic plan to guide its multi-dimensional growth and development.
>
> It mobilised the participation and involvement of most stakeholders in the University of Buea including students, academic and non-academic staff and representatives of sectors of the wider community and representatives of other state universities. (UB Strategic plan 1998-2003)

The foundation was then laid for the University to proceed through the strategic planning process. Faculties and schools prepared their objectives and handed them to the university management. The institution set up a strategic planning committee, which in turn organised a team, which harnessed the inputs from the workshop and the objectives of faculties and schools. An analysis of this information was followed by conceptual framework on which to draw up an appropriate strategic plan for the university. They propounded as follows:

> The University of Buea is at its early formative years. As such it needs a global strategic framework for its growth and development. The strategic plan of the University of Buea is intended to be proactive rather than merely reacting to pressing problems and key issues. (UB Strategic Plan 1998-2003).

The team embarked on what they termed target-oriented project planning approach (TOPP), which identified problems, analysed, their causes and translated them into concrete projects with detailed costing and direction for action. One of the major claims of the team was that all segments of the plan were designed in consultation with the appropriate internal and external stakeholders. Their final recommendation was that a standing committee be set up to oversee the implementation and annual updating of the plan and present their findings and recommendations to the University Council (the highest governing body in the institution). The strategic plan was summarised as follows:

> From the outset the executive and academic staff of the University of Buea had a keen knowledge of the standards they want to achieve. Quality assurance was the foremost theme. But quality assurance cannot happen unless the university has the material means equal to its will to change the conditions under which teaching and learning take place. Largely, such means are beyond the scope of the University of Buea.

> It is our fervent hope that the strategic plan will elicit a greater level of response and support for our efforts from government, the community and friends of the University at home and abroad. (UB Strategic Plan, 1998-2003)

One of the major aims of the strategic planning of (UB) was to raise and stabilise the level of funding, which was found to be unpredictable and unsustainable especially on the government side of the business This implies that the strategic planning process served the purpose of dealing with informational asymmetry in the transaction between the institution and funding bodies rather than for its strategic intent per se (Milgrom & Robert, 1992). This implies that the element of trust will be increased between the institution and its stakeholders and hence attracting the required funding.

It is interesting to observe that the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in the entire process of strategic planning from the workshop to publication of the plan was minimal. The process was not part of a national program or project championed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Furthermore, the implementation of the 1993 reforms did not include any statutory component meant to enable the drawing of a strategic plan for any of the six universities. The university of Buea was simply adapting to the constraints or environmental contingencies of the time.

PART THREE

Lessons for Institutional Strategies

In the light of the framework suggested by the literature on strategic planning some categories could be identified on which discussions could be generated from the case study presented above. The institutional and national circumstances under which the strategic planning was designed is a pointer to how reflection could be focused on the discourse on strategic planning in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The University of Buea was created in circumstances of crisis. During 1993/94 academic years the institution did not receive any formal financing from the government (UB Strategic Plan 1998-2003). This circumstance conditioned the way management thought about the survival of the institution. An independent body was set up to cater for the development of the university through fund raising from well wishers. Before the Ministry of Territorial Administration suspended the fund raising activities of the body they had registered very remarkable success. This might be indicating that the outer limit of the motivation and good will of stakeholders in higher education is not reached.

Despite the economic environment of the country in the early 1990s parents and student were still able to respond to the calls of private universities paying tuition fees, which were three to eight times the registration fees in state universities (at least $250). Therefore a significant amount of resources for the development of higher education institutions is not being adequately used. This argument may be considered as a significant component of strength which institutions can make us of in planning their strategies.

The interdependence of nation states and the process of globalisation may provide opportunities for institutions to explore. The notion that raising the level of skills in the labour force can guarantee development is now almost considered as established wisdom. Castells, (1996, p.253) argues that the skill profile of the newly created jobs in prosperous economies is generally higher than the overall average skill of the labour force. Therefore the more skilled hands there are in an economy better. Globalisation may provide a viable force for higher education institutions to increase their capacity for training research and service to the community through joint ventures, recruitment and retention of qualified researchers, consultancy, and other forms transnational educational opportunities.

The collaboration between UB and the University of Manchester is a case in point. This collaboration had existed before the creation of the University (in the days when it was university centre). Rada, (2001, 93) also holds that globalisation may provide a very power opportunity for educational broking. This permits

competency to be developed and used in the home country through the delivery of courses tailored to the needs of the learners anywhere in the world. This is different from importing solutions that might not best suit local circumstances.

One of the highest points of regret reflected in the UB strategic plan was the inability of the state to supply funding in a foreseeable amount and period. The private institutions, which perhaps may not rely on state funds for survival, may tailor their plans according to available resources. This may lead to a situation whereby the provision of training, research and services in private institutions may be better. However the fear expressed by sceptics is that the race for profitability may deplete quality in such institutions. Another point of weakness in institutions is the lack of adequate management and leadership skills among the support and academic personnel within universities. This hampers the proper management of the available resources (Njeuma, *et al* 1999).

The dominant presence and heavy hand of the government in both governance and institutional management also stifles change management in institutions. The institutional autonomy aimed at in the 1993 reform may not be achieved if the governance structures remain the same nationally. It could also be inferred that these reforms were prompted by the argument that the dynamics of higher education are increasingly becoming too complex and expensive for centralised governmental control as argued by Neave & Van Vught, (1994). The minimal involvement of the ministry of Higher Education in process of strategic planning at the UB provides reason to reflect on the message of Neave and Van Vught that the state could be a referee rather than a player in institutional management.

What implications have the developments in institutions have on planning a strategy in a Sub-Saharan African university? The knowledge-needs of the world, as a single community, have been described by Daniel, (1996) as requiring at least one new university campus every week. Unfortunately the developed countries are already almost adequately covered their national needs for university campuses. This implies

that the bulk of the problem lies in the developing countries. Definitely the way forward is investment in higher education.

Considering the argument made earlier that in order to have maximum benefit from the strength knowledge and information, information strategy should be viewed as supreme by all ambitious organisations. It naturally follows that the technology strategy should also be viewed as a priority. To universities in Sub-Saharan Africa this means that capital investment should be concentrated more on technology than on bricks. This strategy must however be strictly based on empirically tested grass root practitioners-perceptions rather than external pontificating from central government. If access has to be widened and life-long learning developed technology mediated distance learning and other flexible forms of delivery.

Considering that five of the six existing state universities do not have systematically written down strategic plans, my presumption is that the *foreign-expert-driven* 'global strategic plan' for the Ministry of Higher Education might be oriented toward laying grounds or a framework for strategic plans in the higher education institutions. Such a project confirms the propositions of Chambers, (1999); Brock-Utne, (2000) and all proponents of participatory research. Alternatively, the experience of UB is enough to set an agenda for each university to prepare their strategic plans in accordance with its specific corporate plans. By congregating the efforts and visions of the institutions the Ministry of Higher Education could locate itself as a 'referee' in the game. Such a location will naturally result in national guidelines for different aspects of higher education, namely accreditation, quality assessment, funding and others. The merits of this approach are that it is reasonably inductive and is likely to be much more consultative than an *a priori* nationally imposed plan.

Conclusion

Africa is so diversified that a single account does not necessarily apply to every nation-state within the continent in a succinct manner. Therefore a model for the innovation of one system may be completely

irrelevant for another. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to justify that some historical and geographical factors create a common backdrop on which the varied national problems can be analysed (Mebara, 1998). Hence the foregoing premises could justify the inference that Cameroon as a country of 'the south', a developing and Sub-Saharan country could draw inspiration from specific categories of the global, regional as well as local contexts to develop a model for innovation for its higher education system.

The global regional and national context of polarisation is a pervasive and ongoing process. If higher education institutions in Cameroon and in Sub-Saharan Africa general are going to contribute in alleviating this predicament through strategic planning it will have to scan these settings to develop local strategies. The UB experience provides an illustration from which inspiration could be drawn from the external environment, as in the case of their financial dilemma of 1993, to develop local strategies of survival, growth, and adaptation.

Furthermore, the minimal involvement of the Ministry of Higher Education in the technical process of the development of the UB strategic plan provides yet another demonstration of the possibility of a technical cost efficient path of networking all universities in strategic planning. The traditional normative presuppositions of policy view the national Ministry of Higher Education as rational planner that is omnipotent and omnipresent in the universities. This might have been the case in the days gone but numerous analyses have proven that the role of the ministry should be that of a referee rather the player. This is because the dynamics of higher education increase in complexity with time. Therefore the local management and governance teams of the various universities deserve to be *put first and the Ministry last* especially in matters of strategic planning. Government efforts could then be concentrated on developing accountability matrices and performance indicators for the institutions and monitoring them (Ngwana, 2001).

The demonstration of ownership of the strategic plan and at the same acknowledging the participation of an international partner (the University of Manchester in the UK) is an example to emulated by SSA

institutions in their effort toward the shift from policy transfer to policy learning. This reiterates the opportunities that globalisation may offer in terms of international partnership and collaboration. This may collapse the gap between SSA and developed countries in the area of research and development and the architecture of the Castellian 'newest international division of labour' (Castells, 1996: p,107).

Higher education leadership professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa may need to view strategic planning as an intellectual problem and step up their efforts by congregating into an intellectual community on higher education strategic planning. Conroy (2000, p.14) holds that intellectual problems are characterised situations whereby the notion that 'colleagues will always be right' is rejected. This results to the lose of innocence which implies that members of such a community actively make contributions on the issues and at the same time keep their minds open for contrary or complementary views. Though typical intellectual communities are characterised by innocence, such a community may start from the lose of intellectual innocence and proceed to innocence.

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Notes

[1] Nationalists in this region openly manifest their determination to attain independence from La Republic du Cameroun because of the feeling that they are colonised and marginalized. (http://www.southerncameroons.org/bscpa_faqs.html)

[2] Most of the private higher education institutions started in the early 1980s without a formal legal framework defining the procedure of their creation. Given the support they received from the local communities it became even difficult for government to close them down. Though there were some vocational institutions in Yaounde and elsewhere in the Francophone zone offering post secondary qualifications, the idea of an full-fledged university flourished mostly in the English Speaking zone perhaps because of the need for them.

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